

McMurtry's Mill
Hardscrabble Road
Bernards Township
Somerset County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

McMurtry's Mill
Hardscrabble Road
Bernards Township
Somerset County, New Jersey

Owner: Willmere Farm Inc.

Date of Erection: 1850

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Adnah McMurtry, owner 1867-72

Present Condition: Original water-powered saw-mill;
inactive since 1921

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - hewn timber frame; vertical
board siding and large sliding doors

Chimneys - none

Roof - gable, wood shingled

Flooring - plank

Historical Data:

An account of mills in Bernards Township, Somerset County(a), published in 1881, mentioned the following: Ferdinand Van Dorn's flour mill* on the headwaters of Passaic River on the line between Somerset and Morris Counties; Richard Irving's spoke and felloe factory at Madisonville, run by steam; a water-driven saw-mill between that place and Bernardsville; a "Saw-mill owned by Widow McMurtry, above Van Doren's, on the Passaic;" B. Guerin's flour and grist-mill on Mine Brook at Bernardsville; Bunn Brothers'

(a) J.P. Snell, History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, 1881, p. 749

* Surveyed as NJ-67

flour and feed mill below it on the same stream, being a large four story stone mill of three run of stones with and up and down and circular attachment for cutting lumber; Charles Baker's Mine Brook Mill; James Bunn's grist and saw-mill on a mountain stream in the northwest part of the township; Peter Z. Smith's saw-mill and brush-back factory on the north branch of Raritan River in the extreme northwest part of the township; Ludlow Brothers' hat factory farther down the branch; and Leason's custom flour and feed mills, formerly Dunn's, on the Somerset-Morris County line.

The saw-mill here considered, mentioned above in 1881, is indicated and marked "SM" on the "Estate of A. McMurtrie" lying on the west bank of Passaic River, in the map of Bernard Township, plate 23 of F. W. Beers' Atlas of Somerset County, New Jersey, published in 1873. Old Army Road is the highway shown there traversing the estate as it follows the river.

Search of title to this saw-mill property in the county records, further to identify it and to establish the date of erection and successive ownership, is reported as follows:

At a public sale held on 1st October 1827, "At the house of Samuel McMurtry, Innkeeper, in the Town of Bernards," John J. Gaston, sheriff, sold to the same McMurtry as highest bidder, a certain 100 acre tract in that township for \$1375 and conveyed it to him by deed of 16 October following in which conveyance the tract is described as extending southwest from a front on the "Forge Pond" of the Passaic River, and as sold under legal proceedings foreclosing a mortgage placed on the property by one Bailey Brees and wife, dated 13 June 1822.(b)

(b) Samuel McMurtry's granddaughter, Miss Margaret J. McMurtry, residing on the homestead farm 1941, reports the existence of a mill on the property when purchased by him in 1827, his operation thereof until retirement to Basking Ridge in 1850, his sale of the homestead to his son Adnah and the erection of the present mill by the latter. (Nettie Allen of Basking Ridge, N.J., letter of 1 Sept. 1941. See also reference (2) postea.

Brees had purchased the same tract from Roger Pegg and wife, of New York City for \$1000 by deed of 13 June 1821, Pegg from Benjamin Bostwick and wife, of same city, for \$2,280 by deed of 20 October 1819, Bostwick from David Freeman and wife, of Franklin Township, Somerset County, New Jersey, for \$7000 by deed of 25 October 1817, Freeman from Oliver Ogden of Tewksbury Township, Hunterdon County, in a division of a 347 acre tract half and half by deed of 2 December 1812, Freeman and Ogden from Jehn Bayles and wife and Jehn N. Simpson and wife, all of Somerset County, for \$6,053 by deed of 2 March 1808, in which the tract is described as "farm plantation," on Passaic River, north of the "Road leading from Samuel Woodward's grist mill to Mendham." In these several conveyances no saw-mill is particularly mentioned. Considering the four successive non-resident owners of the tract as above listed from 1808 to 1821, it may be surmised that Samuel McMurtry of nearby Bernards town, who purchased it in 1827, probably was the first owner to erect a mill thereon.(b)

Samuel McMurtry, of Bernards Township, the grantee abovenamed, held this tract until 1st April 1867, on which date he, with wife Margaret, conveyed it to their son Adnah McMurtry of same place for \$6,000. In this deed the 100 acre tract is described as bounded east by Passaic River, north by Indian Grove Brook and south by a "little stream of water crossing the road under a stone arch bridge."

Adnah McMurtry who thus obtained title to the property in 1867 held the same and died intestate on 1st March 1872(c). It is marked accordingly as the "Estate of A. McMurtrie" on the map of Bernards Township published in 1873 as mentioned above, with the saw-mill indicated thereon also.

By deed of 1st January 1874 his administrator, Oscar H. McMurtry, conveyed the same 100 acre tract to the widow Sarah McMurtry. She died intestate on 10 February 1912, leaving as heirs, daughters Anna D., wife of Luther Childs of Lyons, New Jersey, and Marguerite J. McMurtry, and sons Fred and Samuel

(c) "Adnah was killed in the basement of the mill while making some minor repairs to the machinery, his clothing caught in the set screw of a collar that encircles the main shaft and he was whirled to destruction. His son Fred operated the mill until 1921 when it ceased to be used." (Nettie Allen, supra, citing reference (2) postea.)

McMurtry, the last three named being then of Bernardsville, New Jersey.

Of these, Mrs. Childs died intestate on 2 November 1924, leaving as heirs, her husband Luther Childs and her sons J. Herbert and E. Ellsworth Childs; Frederick C. McMurtry died intestate and unmarried on 20 April 1926; Samuel McMurtry died likewise intestate and unmarried on 5 August 1926. Accordingly the estate devolved to Marguerite J. McMurtry and the two sons of her sister Anna D. Childs abovesaid, subject to the life interest of the latter's husband, Luther Childs.

These three heirs conveyed the 100 acre farm to William Childs (a brother of Luther Childs above mentioned) of Bernards Township by their deed of 19 September 1927, reciting the deed of 1st April 1867, and he to the Willmere Farm, a New Jersey Corporation, of Jersey City, by deed of 27 January 1928 with other land adjacent. This corporation remained as owner of this mill at the time of our survey of the building in December 1938. The mill stands beside the Passaic River and is approached from the Hardscrabble or Mendham Road.

References:

Search of title in Somerset County records by James Hanlon, H.A.B.S. abstractor, reported 17 March 1941

Newark Evening News, 15 Dec. 1923, p. 3-X of Saturday supplement, "Up-and-Down saw mill in Bernards Township," with 3 photos: the saw, Fred McMurtry, the mill.

Levin D. Cook

Supervising Historian 3 Sept. 1941

Approved:

Seymour Williams

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F. A. I.A.
District Officer